

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

REF: STATE 022819

1. FOLLOWING IS FINAL TEXT OF ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT
FOR YOUR COUNTRY FOR PRESENTATION TO HOST GOVERNMENT IN
ACCORDANCE WITH REFTEL INSTRUCTIONS.

MAURITANIA'S OVERRIDING CONCERN AT PRESENT IS TO DEFEND
ITSELF AGAINST ATTACKS ON ITS ECONOMIC AND URBAN CENTERS BY
GUERRILLAS OF THE POLISARIO FRONT, OPERATING OUT OF ALGERIA.
DESPITE THIS PREOCCUPATION, THE GOVERNMENT OF MAURITANIA
RESPECTS GENERALLY IN WORD AND FUNDAMENTALLY IN DEED THE
HUMAN RIGHTS OF ITS CITIZENS. ITS CONSTITUTION REFLECTS
BOTH THE FRENCH DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND THE
UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

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(1) RESPECT FOR THE INTEGRITY OF THE PERSON, INCLUDING
FREEDOM FROM:

A. TORTURE

MAURITANIAN LAW PROHIBITS THE USE OF TORTURE AND THERE ARE

NO REPORTS THAT IT HAS BEEN PRACTICED IN MAURITANIA.

B. CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

THESE TYPES OF TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT ARE NOT PRACTICED.
THERE ARE NO REPORTS OF ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE.

C. ARBITRARY ARREST OR IMPRISONMENT

THIS IS PROHIBITED BY LAW AND GENERALLY IS NOT PRACTICED IN MAURITANIA. SOME PERSONS, HOWEVER, HAVE BEEN ARRESTED AND DETAINED IN THE PAST FOR PARTICIPATING IN ILLEGAL POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN CONTRAVENTION OF THE MAURITANIAN CONSTITUTION WHICH RECOGNIZES ONLY ONE POLITICAL PARTY. THIRTY PERSONS DETAINED FOR SUCH ILLEGAL POLITICAL ACTIVITIES WERE ADOPTED BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, WHICH IN ITS 1975-76 REPORT NOTED THAT ALL HAD BENEFITED FROM A GENERAL AMNESTY DECLARED BY THE MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT IN SEPTEMBER, 1975. WE HAVE NO INFORMATION ON WHEN THESE PERSONS WERE DETAINED, OR WHETHER THEY WERE GRANTED FAIR, PUBLIC TRIALS AT THE TIME. THE ONGOING POLISARIO ATTACKS ON MAURITANIA'S URBAN AND ECONOMIC CENTERS PROMPTED INTERNAL SECURITY MEASURES SUCH AS QUESTIONING OF SUSPECTED POLISARIO SUPPORTERS BY THE AUTHORITIES. SOME 100-200 SUSPECTS WERE BROUGHT IN FOR INTERROGATION FOLLOWING THE UNCLASSIFIED

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FIRST ATTACK ON THE CAPITAL CITY OF NOUAKCHOTT IN JULY, 1976. THEY WERE RELEASED WITHIN FOUR OR FIVE DAYS. THERE ARE NO REPORTS OF ANY POLITICAL PRISONERS OR DETAINEES IN MAURITANIA AT THIS TIME.

D. DENIAL OF FAIR PUBLIC TRIAL

FAIR, PUBLIC TRIALS ARE PROVIDED.

E. INVASION OF THE HOME

THIS IS PROHIBITED BY LAW AND IS NOT PRACTICED.

(2) GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES RELATING TO THE FULFILLMENT OF SUCH VITAL NEEDS AS FOOD, SHELTER, HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION.

MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICIES ARE DESIGNED TO RESPOND DIRECTLY TO THE NEEDS OF THE POOR-- THE SEDENTARY AGRICULTURAL AND WIDELY DISPERSED NOMADIC PEOPLES WHICH MAKE UP 75 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION. THE NATIONAL GOALS ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF MAURITANIA ARE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL WELFARE. THE THIRD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN (1976-81) EMPHASIZES GROWTH IN THE RURAL SECTOR. PRESENT GOVERNMENT CONCENTRATION IS ON INCREASED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, AND EVENTUAL FOOD SELF-SUFFICIENCY, THROUGH EMPHASIS ON FOOD CROPS AND BETTER CULTIVATION TECHNIQUES, IMPROVED RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE, TRAINING, AND EXTENSION OF EXISTING LIVESTOCK PROGRAMS. THE GOVERNMENT ALSO SEEKS TO IMPROVE HEALTH SERVICES TO THE RURAL POOR. THE RESULT OF THIS POLICY IS ALLOCATION OF AN INCREASING PROPORTION OF GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES TO THE RURAL SECTOR.

(3) RESPECT FOR CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES, INCLUDING:

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A. FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, SPEECH, PRESS, RELIGION AND ASSEMBLY

THESE FREEDOMS ARE PROTECTED. ALTHOUGH THE MAURITANIAN CONSTITUTION PROCLAIMS ISLAM TO BE THE RELIGION OF THE MAURITANIAN PEOPLE, (AND THE FORMAL NATIONAL NAME OF THE COUNTRY IS THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF MAURITANIA), THE CONSTITUTION GUARANTEES "FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE AND THE RIGHT TO PRACTICE ONE'S RELIGION." THESE DO EXIST IN FACT, AND NON-MOSLEMS HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED DIFFICULTY EXERCISING THEIR RELIGION IN MAURITANIA. THERE IS A ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOP, SEVERAL CATHOLIC CONGREGATIONS, AND THERE ARE NO RESTRICTIONS IN FACT ON ANY RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION OR PRACTICE. NINETY-NINE PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IS MOSLEM. MAURITANIA HAS ONE UNION, THE UNION OF MAURITANIAN WORKERS, WHICH IS CLOSELY ALLIED TO THE GOVERNMENT. THE ONE DAILY NEWSPAPER IS PUBLISHED BY THE GOVERNMENT AND THERE IS ONE GOVERNMENT RADIO STATION. THESE ARE INDICATIONS OF THE STATE OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RATHER THAN AN EFFORT TO CONTROL THE MEDIA. INTERNATIONAL SHORTWAVE BROADCASTS AND TELEVISION BROADCASTS FROM NEARBY DAKAR, SENEGAL, ARE RECEIVED WITHOUT INTERFERENCE. FOREIGN NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES, JOURNALS, AND BOOKS FREELY CIRCULATE AND ARE READILY AVAILABLE TO ALL WITHOUT ANY GOVERNMENT RESTRICTION, EVEN WHEN CONTAINING INFORMATION OR COMMENTARY CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE GOVERNMENT MAKES NO ATTEMPT TO ENFORCE IDEOLOGICAL CONFORMITY, AND THE AVERAGE MAURITANIAN CITIZEN FREELY EXPRESSES HIS VIEWS ON NATIONAL ISSUES.

B. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT WITHIN THE COUNTRY, FOREIGN TRAVEL AND EMIGRATION

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FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT IS ALLOWED WITHIN MAURITANIA, SUBJECT TO CONTROL OVER TRAVEL TO SOME AREAS BECAUSE OF THE POLISARIO GUERRILLA MILITARY ACTIVITY. FOREIGN TRAVEL AND EMIGRATION ARE NOT RESTRICTED.

C. FREEDOM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

THE MAURITANIAN CONSTITUTION ASSURES EQUALITY TO ALL IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS, REGARDLESS OF RACE, RELIGION, OR SEX--BUT ONLY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE MAURITANIAN PEOPLES PARTY, THE SOLE LEGAL POLITICAL PARTY IN MAURITANIA. THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND THE PRESIDENT ARE ELECTED BY UNIVERSAL ADULT SUFFRAGE.

(4) GOVERNMENT ATTITUDE AND RECORD REGARDING INTERNATIONAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

WE ARE AWARE OF NO OUTSTANDING REQUESTS FOR OUTSIDE INVESTIGATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS IN MAURITANIA, BUT BELIEVE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD RESPOND FAVORABLY SHOULD SUCH REQUESTS BE MADE BY RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATIONS.
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